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Summary

About this Release

This is one of a series of Historical State Year Books for Queensland.

Comprises a general reference for any person who wishes to acquire a broad knowledge of the State of Queensland. Separate chapters are devoted to: history and government; environment; population; labour; health; welfare; education and training; finance; law and order; tourism; the arts and sport; agriculture; mining; manufacturing; housing and construction; transport and communication; and trade and prices.

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QANTAS Serves Australia - From the Queensland Outback to the World (Feature Article)

Special Article - QANTAS Serves Australia - From the Queensland Outback to the World

Contributed by Qantas Airways for the 1986 Queensland Year Book. Article reproduced from Queensland Year Book, 1986 (ABS Cat No 1301.3)

One of Queensland's claims to fame is that it was the birthplace of Australia's national airline, Qantas. The airline was conceived in a heavily laden and protesting Model T Ford lurching its way across the trackless wilderness in the north west of the State.

The year was 1919, and two Australian Flying Corps veterans of World War I, Lieutenants P. J. McGinness and W. Hudson Fysh, were surveying part of the route for an air race from England to Australia. The race, which offered a prize of \$20,000 for the first to complete the flight in fewer than 30 days, was one the two young airmen would have liked to have entered but they didn't have enough money. Every bone-jarring kilometre convinced the pair that aeroplanes were the solution to the supply and communications problems of the outback. They had little trouble convincing a Queensland grazier of the soundness of their idea. When they first met him, his car was in the Cloncurry River with a broken axle. The grazier, Fergus McMaster, and some of his business associates, later invested some money in the venture and, on 16 November 1920, The Queensland and Northern Territory Aerial Services Ltd was registered as a company, with headquarters at Winton, western Queensland.

Almost immediately the air service became known by its acronym, Q.A.N.T.A.S. The first aircraft were a one-passenger BE2E and a two-passenger Avro 504K, war surplus bi-planes with a speed of 104 kilometres per hour. Joyrides at three guineas (\$6.30) a trip gave residents of the outback a taste for flying and helped pay for flights between Queensland's western railheads and Darwin. In the first 2 years the airline flew more than 54,000 kilometres and carried 871 passengers, but it needed further 'donations' from the shareholders to keep the company solvent. The situation improved when Fergus McMaster, the chairman, negotiated a government mail subsidy.

The airline consolidated a pattern of regular scheduled flights and air taxi services across a wide tract of northern Australia and played an important role in the development of the outback for the next 12 years, when the decision was taken to go international. Qantas had taken its first step towards international operations in April 1931 when it flew mail as far as Darwin in an experimental air mail service between Australia and England. It then tendered for a contract to carry the Royal Mail from Australia to Singapore and became an international operator in 1935. On 25 February 1935, Qantas spread its wings when one of its DH86 aircraft flew from Darwin to Singapore. On the same day, another DH86 took off from Singapore with mail for Brisbane, where it arrived on 28 February. Passenger services were inaugurated on the new route on 17 April 1935. With four engines and a range of 1,230 kilometres, the DH86 was well suited to the long Timor Sea crossing and brought great success to Qantas' pioneering international service. The 7,018 kilometre sector, taking an average three and a half days, was for some time the fastest overseas commercial air service in the world.

The Brisbane to Croydon (England) service was then developed. It covered a total of 20,525 kilometres, took 12 to 14 days, and involved dozens of stops, including three overnight stops in Australia. Passengers flew in five different types of aircraft owned by three airlines, Qantas, Imperial, and Indian Trans Continental Airways, and used the services of both the French and Italian railways.

In 1938, Qantas switched headquarters from Brisbane to Sydney, where the Short-S23 Empire Class flying boat, taking off from Rose Bay, started a new style of service from Australia to Britain. The flying boats changed the whole concept of long-distance air travel. They could not only land and take off on water but their size was such that passengers could now leave their seats and walk around in flight. The enjoyment of such comforts, however, was soon interrupted by the maelstrom of World War 2. At first the war had no marked effect on Qantas' operations. It wasn't until Japan entered the war and occupied Malaya and the Dutch East Indies (Indonesia) that vital refuelling bases were lost and Qantas had its baptism of fire as a frontline airline.

Qantas aircraft did a considerable amount of work evacuating civilians and wounded from New Guinea and later carried the first troops back into the area. Throughout the war Qantas maintained tenuous services to Britain, via South Africa at first, then through Ceylon (Sri Lanka) and India. Radio silence was a feature of most of the wartime flights, which included ferrying troops and supplies in extremely hazardous conditions. The non-stop service from Perth to Colombo took anything from 26 to 32 flying hours and had to be made in complete radio silence. Those who flew the route became members of an elite band called 'The Secret Order Of The Double Sunrise'.

The mid-1940s saw the introduction of the long-range Catalina flying boats, then Liberators, the Douglas DC-3, and Lancastrians. In 1947, the famed kangaroo with wings insignia made its debut for Qantas on what became known as the Kangaroo Route to London. In 1947 the Commonwealth Government purchased all the shares in Qantas and confirmed it as Australia's international airline. Through the 1950s Qantas enjoyed a spectacular period of

route development and in 1959 became the first non-American airline to operate the new Boeing 707 jets and the first airline to introduce jet travel to the South Pacific.

In 1960 the once impossible dream of a round-the-world service was realised. Two Super Constellations were dispatched simultaneously from Melbourne. One flew west on the Kangaroo Route via South East Asia, India, and Europe to London, while the other flew east over the Pacific on the Southern Cross route to San Francisco, New York, and on across the Atlantic to Britain. It wasn't long before eight of these services were being flown each week, four of them all-Qantas flights and the others flown in conjunction with BOAC. The flying kangaroo was now a familiar sight in 23 countries on five continents around the globe.

The successful development of the commercial jetliner heralded the birth of a new era in air travel, the hallmarks of which were speed and comfort of a previously unknown degree. The Boeing 707 fleet was rapidly expanded and by 1964 Qantas had 13 operating on most routes and had sold off its old prop fleet. It was not long before the early 707s were being replaced by an improved version, 21 of which were in service by 1968. Concurrently, aircraft design and technology were progressing by leaps and bounds and another 'new era' of mass travel and low fares was about to burst on the world.

With passenger demand increasing, the company took delivery in 1971 of its first four Jumbo 747s, aircraft that were ordered with foresight in 1967. With the introduction of the 747 on Qantas routes, the airline embarked on a series of low-fare initiatives which revolutionised the Australian travel scene and produced phenomenal growth in revenue earned and passengers carried. The success of the Jumbo was such that Qantas progressively sold off all older aircraft and in 1979 became the first airline to operate a fleet made up entirely of Boeing 747s. Not ordinary 747s, but 747-238 B aircraft designed to cope with Australia's geographical position, so far away from North America and Europe. Further models of the 747 were progressively added to the Qantas fleet with the airline incorporating 747 Extended Upper Deck aircraft into its operations from 1984.

The all-747 era came to an end in July 1985 with the delivery of the first of six 767 Extended Range aircraft, part of a billion dollar fleet modernisation program involving the 767ER and the 747EUD. The program will see the Qantas fleet number 28 Boeing jets by March 1986. The airline has been well served by its all-747 fleet and is to continue its long-term policy of ensuring that the fleet includes the very latest equipment, technology, and passenger comfort. Introduction of a smaller aircraft to the fleet, together with the 747EUD, will give maximum flexibility.

With the delivery of the initial 747EUD in November 1984 the public was treated to the sight of a 'new' Qantas, with the aircraft the first to bear the airline's new livery. It features a white body and a more prominent kangaroo, minus the wings, silhouetted against a red background that sweeps down from the tailfin around the fuselage. 'QANTAS' is displayed in black on both sides of the fuselage.

Qantas has come a long way since it made that first, tentative hop into international aviation in 1935. The staff of 30 in those days has grown to more than 12,000 and the airline now has offices in 58 cities around the world. The Qantas jet base in Sydney houses the airline's Flight Control, where the movements of all Qantas aircraft world wide are monitored 24 hours a day. The base also features a catering centre that produces up to 20,000 meals a day, an advanced air cargo complex, and its computer network, the biggest installation of its kind in Australia, which can handle a myriad of tasks ranging from selecting mechanical components from a huge inventory to booking a hotel room for a passenger. Another facility at the jet base trains cabin crew, not just in the art of serving passengers and providing refreshments, but also in the serious business of handling emergencies.

In its 1984-85 financial year, Qantas reported a record pre-tax profit of \$62.7m compared with \$58.0m in the previous year. Passengers carried increased from 2,115,252 to 2,449,541 while cargo carried rose from 533,115,000 tonne-kilometres to 617,056,000 tonne-kilometres in the same period. From humble beginnings in the Queensland bush more than 60 years ago, Qantas has grown into one of the world's great airlines with assets worth around one billion dollars. Would even the most visionary have imagined, in 1920, that more than three million people would be travelling in and out of Australia by air each year? In the forefront of this growth has been Australia's international airline, Qantas.

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